

than a penny for a day's hay-making, more than twopence or threepence for a day's reaping. It completely failed, for wages rose abnormally and never came down again.¹ It was impossible to enforce the Act except through the agency of the landlord class itself, and the landlord was often in no position to bargain with his men or to threaten them with the terrors of the law. If he offered them the bare legal wage,² the free labourers would offer themselves to some neighbouring bailiff, who, when his harvests were rotting on the ground, would be ready enough to give them what they asked. It is true that they would thus subject themselves to the penalties of the statute for refusing the legal wage when proffered by their landlord; but while he was setting the machinery of the law in motion against them, the harvest season would be over. Men in prison cannot reap a field. Nevertheless, in spite of the absence of any federated resistance on the part of the masters, in spite of the continued rise of wages by competition, the attempt to enforce the statute continued. Though it could not keep wages down, its penalties were inflicted to such an extent that the fines were considered as a regular and important source of income.³ Leaders of local unions and their followers were had up before the justices. A few of these old indictments are still to be found in the Record Office. We read how, in a Suffolk village, Walter Halderby * took of divers persons at reaping-time sixpence or eightpence a day, and very often at the same time made various congregations of labourers in different places and counselled them not to take less than sixpence or eightpence.⁴ The statute, with peculiar folly, had fixed the legal wage for reaping at twopence or threepence, regardless of the higher price that had in many cases been paid for this work even before the Black Death. Labour troubles and the mutual antagonism of classes were inevitable accompaniments of the social changes that took place in the fourteenth century, but they were unnecessarily embittered by the enforcement of an Act which so crudely disregarded the

¹ 25 Ed. III. 2; Rogers, i. 265-71.

³ *Stats. of Realm*, 31 Ed. III. 1, cap. 6; 36 Ed. III. 1, cap. 14.
⁴ *Anc. Ind.*, no. 92; *Ibid.* Essex, no. 19, 1-13 B. It.; *Ibid.* Norfolk, no. 35, 16 Ed. III.-2 B. II.